



Revelation 21 is one of the most visually dense chapters in the Bible. It describes the "New Jerusalem," which is not just a location, but a symbol of the perfected community of God—the intersection of heaven and earth.

Here is an unpacking of the major symbolism and numerology found in the text.

## 1. The Numerology: 12 and the Cube

The chapter is obsessed with the number **12**. In biblical numerology, 12 represents **governmental perfection** and the **people of God** (12 tribes of Israel in the OT, 12 Apostles in the NT).

- **The 12 Gates & 12 Foundations:** The city has 12 gates inscribed with the names of the **12 Tribes of Israel** and 12 foundations inscribed with the names of the **12 Apostles**.
  - *Meaning:* This symbolizes the unification of the old and new covenants. The entire family of God (Israel and the Church) forms the structure of this new reality.
- **The Measurements (12,000 & 144):** The city measures 12,000 stadia in length, width, and height. The walls are 144 cubits thick (12 x 12).
  - *Meaning:* These are not literal architectural blueprints but theological statements. Multiples of 12 (like 144 or 12,000) represent vastness and total completeness. It indicates that there is room for everyone who is meant to be there; the number of the redeemed is complete.
- **The Shape (The Cube):** The city is described as a perfect cube ("its length and width and height are equal").

- *Meaning:* In the Old Testament, the **Holy of Holies** (the inner sanctuary of the Temple where God's presence dwelt) was a perfect cube (1 Kings 6:20). By describing the *entire city* as a cube, John is saying the New Jerusalem does not *have* a temple; *it is* a temple. The separation between the "holy place" and the "common people" is gone.

## 2. The Materials

The construction materials serve as symbols for the character and purity of this new existence.

- **Gold like Glass:** The city is made of pure gold, but it is described as "clear as glass."
  - *Meaning:* Gold represents value and royalty, but the "transparency" suggests a lack of secrets or hidden impurities. It symbolizes a community of total truth and clarity, where nothing is hidden.
- **The Pearl Gates:** The 12 gates are each made of a single, massive pearl.
  - *Meaning:* A pearl is the only gem formed by a living organism in response to suffering (an irritant inside the oyster). This is often interpreted as a symbol that entrance into the kingdom is made possible through the suffering of the Lamb (Christ).
- **The Precious Stones:** The foundations are decorated with 12 precious stones (jasper, sapphire, emerald, etc.).
  - *Meaning:* These stones mirror the stones on the **High Priest's breastplate** in Exodus. This signifies that in the New Jerusalem, all of God's people have priestly status.

## 3. The "Missing" Things

Much of the symbolism in Revelation 21 is defined by what is **absent**.

- **No Sea (v. 1):** "And there was no longer any sea."
  - *Meaning:* To the ancient Jewish mind, the sea represented chaos, danger, and separation (it was the home of Leviathan and the barrier to the nations). Its absence symbolizes the end of chaos and danger.
- **No Temple (v. 22):** "I saw no temple in it."
  - *Meaning:* A temple is a place where you go to visit God. If God is everywhere and you see Him face to face, you no longer need a building to facilitate that meeting. Religion as a system is replaced by relationship.
- **No Sun or Moon (v. 23):** "The city does not need the sun or the moon."
  - *Meaning:* This does not necessarily mean literal darkness, but rather that the source of light has changed. God's glory is the illumination. It reflects the idea that created things (sun/moon) are no longer needed to sustain life; the Creator sustains it directly.

## Summary

The vision of Revelation 21 uses the imagery of a **Garden** (life), a **City** (community), and a **Temple** (worship) to describe the final state of humanity.

The overriding message is **reconciliation**: The barrier of sin is removed (the transparent gold), the chaos of history is tamed (no sea), and the distance between God and humans is closed (the cube shape).

# Revelation 21 Symbolism and Numerology

## Reformed view

Here is an analysis of the symbolism and numerology in Revelation 21, viewed specifically through the lens of **Reformed Theology** (drawing from sources like G.K. Beale, William Hendriksen, Geerhardus Vos, and the covenantal framework of the Westminster tradition).

In this view, Revelation 21 is not just a picture of "heaven," but the final consummation of the **Covenant of Grace**—the moment where the dwelling place of God is finally and permanently with the elect.

### 1. The Numerology: The Fullness of the Elect

Reformed hermeneutics generally rejects literalism in apocalyptic literature, instead viewing numbers as symbolic of spiritual realities.

- **The Number 12 (Covenantal Unity):** The recurrence of 12 (gates and foundations) is seen as the visual proof of the **Unity of the Covenant**.
  - *The Reformed View:* Reformed theology teaches there is only one people of God throughout history. The 12 Gates (Tribes/Old Testament Saints) and 12 Foundations (Apostles/New Testament Saints) are fused together. This confirms that the Church is not a "Plan B" but the continuation of true Israel. It is the one flock under one Shepherd (John 10:16).
- **The Measurements (12,000 & 144):**
  - *The Reformed View:* These numbers represent the **Fullness of the Elect**. The number 12,000 (12 x 1,000) signifies the perfect number of the redeemed, multiplied by immensity (1,000 often signifies a vast, complete period or quantity). It affirms the Calvinistic doctrine of *Limited Atonement* and *Irresistible Grace* in their final result: Christ has lost none of those the Father gave Him; the city is exactly the size it was predestined to be.
- **The Cube (The Cosmic Temple):**
  - *The Reformed View:* As noted by scholar G.K. Beale, the cubic shape mirrors the **Holy of Holies** in the Solomonic Temple. The symbolism here is that the boundaries of the "Holy of Holies" have been expanded to encompass the entire new creation. The veil has not just been torn; it has been removed entirely. The entire cosmos has become the sanctuary of God.

### 2. The Materials: The Reflection of Glory

The description of the city is interpreted not as material opulence, but as a reflection of the **Glory of God** (*Gloria Dei*).

- **Gold "Like Clear Glass":**

- *The Reformed View:* This points to **Sanctification Glorified**. Gold in Scripture often relates to royalty and divinity, but its transparency here is key. The "dross" of sin—which obscures the image of God in man—has been fully purged. The Church (the Bride) is now fully holy, reflecting God's glory without the distortion of sin or the "flesh."
- **The Precious Stones:**
  - *The Reformed View:* These stones parallel the High Priest's breastplate (Exodus 28). In the Old Testament, the High Priest represented the people before God. In the New Jerusalem, the *priesthood of all believers* is fully realized. Every believer is now a precious stone in the living temple of God (1 Peter 2:5), permanently set in the foundation of His presence.

### 3. The "No's: The Removal of the Curse

Reformed eschatology emphasizes the **restoration** of creation—a return to Eden, but better (glorified). The things that are "missing" are the result of the Fall being reversed.

- **"No More Sea" (v. 1):**
  - *The Reformed View:* This is often interpreted typologically. In the Old Testament, the sea represented the Gentile nations in rebellion and the source of the chaotic beasts (Daniel 7). "No more sea" implies the end of the separation between Jew and Gentile, and the total subduing of chaotic, rebellious evil. The elect are gathered from the "sea" of humanity onto solid ground.
- **"No Temple" (v. 22):**
  - *The Reformed View:* This is the culmination of **Covenant Theology**. The covenant formula—"I will be your God, and you will be my people"—is perfectly realized. Temples are mediators; they are necessary only when God is separate from His people. The absence of a temple signifies that the *Mediatorial Kingdom* of Christ has succeeded. He has brought us to the Father, and now God is "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

### Summary: The City *Is* The Bride

Perhaps the most distinctively Reformed insight is that the New Jerusalem is not a place the church *goes to*, but a symbol of what the church *is*.

As Revelation 21:9–10 makes clear, the angel says, "*Come, I will show you the Bride,*" and then shows John *the City*.

- **The Conclusion:** The gold, the pearls, and the light are not describing real estate; they are describing **us**—the corporate body of Christ, finally washed, justified, and glorified, dwelling in the immediate presence of the Triune God.

# Gates of Pearl

To Reformed scholars like G.K. Beale, William Hendriksen, and those in the Redemptive-Historical tradition, the "gates of pearl" are not merely decorative details. They are theological statements about **Christ** and **access to God**.

While popular devotion often focuses on how a pearl is formed (through the suffering of an oyster), academic Reformed commentary tends to focus on **Exclusivity**, **Unity**, and **Value**.

## 1. The Symbol of Exclusivity (The Pearl of Great Price)

Reformed commentators almost unanimously connect Revelation 21:21 back to Jesus's parable in **Matthew 13:45–46**—the "Pearl of Great Price."

- **The Interpretation:** In the parable, the merchant sells *everything* he has to acquire the one pearl. By making every gate a single, massive pearl, John is signaling that entrance into this city costs everything. It requires the total surrender of the self.
- **Christ as the Door:** As G.K. Beale notes, the fact that the gate *is* the pearl suggests that the gate *is* Christ. This aligns with John 10:9: "*I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved.*" There is no other material, and no other way.

## 2. The Symbol of Unity (Uniformity vs. Diversity)

Scholars like Hendriksen and Beale draw a sharp contrast between the **foundations** of the city and the **gates** of the city.

- **The Foundations (Diversity):** There are 12 foundations, each made of a *different* stone (jasper, sapphire, emerald, etc.). This represents the **diversity of the Church**—different gifts, different nations, different personalities, all united in the structure of God's people.
- **The Gates (Uniformity):** There are 12 gates, but they are all made of the *same* material: "*Each individual gate was of one pearl.*"
  - **The Meaning:** While the people of God are diverse (multi-colored stones), the **way of salvation** is singular (one uniform pearl). Whether you enter from the north, south, east, or west (representing all tribes and tongues), you enter through the exact same means: the perfect righteousness of Christ. There is no "Gentile gate" or "Jewish gate"; there is only the Pearl.

## 3. The Rejection of Literalism (The Nature of the Miracle)

Reformed hermeneutics (interpretation) is careful to warn against literalizing the architecture.

- **The Size:** A pearl the size of a city gate is a biological impossibility in the current creation.
- **The Point:** Hendriksen points out that this impossibility is intentional. It reminds the reader that the New Jerusalem is **supernatural** in origin. It is not built by human hands

(which would use bricks or hewn stone); it is built by God using materials that imply organic perfection and wholeness.

#### 4. The "Suffering" Connection (A Devotional Inference)

While academic commentaries (like Beale's) focus on the *value* and *oneness* of the pearl, many Reformed preachers and devotional writers (such as Donald Grey Barnhouse) have historically highlighted the biological formation of the pearl to teach **Atonement**.

- **The Symbol:** A pearl is the only gem formed by a living creature, and it is formed only as a response to an injury (an irritant). The oyster covers the "wound" with layers of nacre.
- **The Application:** This is often preached to symbolize that the gates of heaven are only open because the "Living One" (Christ) was wounded. The entrance to glory is formed by the covering of the wound of sin with the luster of His grace.

#### Summary

For the Reformed theologian, the Gates of Pearl signify that while the Church is diverse (many stones), the Gospel is narrow (one Pearl). Entrance into the presence of God is **singular** (Christ alone), **costly** (worth everything), and **beautiful** (removing the "irritant" of sin).